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Top Secret



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*The Situation in Yemen and South Yemen
and the Soviet Role*

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8 December 1967

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
8 December 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Yemen and South Yemen
And the Soviet Role

Summary

The withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen has enabled the Yemeni royalists to threaten the republican position in the northern part of the country and to lay siege to the capital, Sana.

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The republicans, in their hour of need, have been denied material support from Egypt but have obtained aircraft and other military supplies from the USSR

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This intervention by the Soviets clearly began as a product of Moscow's general desire to demonstrate support for "progressive" Arab nationalism; if things get worse, they may ease out. If they are successful, the Soviets will also have salvaged something of Nasir's investment in Yemen--an investment which they consistently supported--with little risk of a great-power confrontation.

Note: * This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Services.

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The outcome of the struggle now going on in Yemen will inevitably affect the future of the newly independent state of South Yemen (formerly South Arabia). The socialist-minded Arab nationalist government just installed in South Yemen will almost certainly become embroiled in some fashion with Yemen if the royalists win there; if the republicans win, the South Yemenis are likely to gravitate toward collaboration or even eventually merge with the larger country. In any case, political and economic need in the south opens further opportunities to the Soviets.

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The Military Situation

1. Royalist advances in Yemen since the Egyptian troops began to withdraw have brought them to the outskirts of Sana, the capital. Royalist forces broke through the first line of defense around the capital on 4 December, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] and advanced to within two miles of the city, which they surrounded on the north, east, and south. The royalists have been shelling the military airfield near Sana, forcing the republicans to move all of their aircraft to Hudaydah. Employees of a number of foreign embassies, including the Soviet, have been withdrawn to Taiz in the south. President Iryani has arrived in Cairo, presumably to make a last-ditch appeal for Egyptian aid, although he may well feel safer away from Sana.

Sources of Aid for the Royalists

2. The royalists have received help from several external sources in the course of the five-year-old civil war [REDACTED]

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Shortly thereafter, Iran began a program of aid which included weapons, ammunition, and a number of Arabic-speaking instructors from the Iranian Army, who are believed to have handled advanced weapons in actual combat with Egyptian forces. Considerable equipment was delivered to the royalists in the fall of 1967, although the royalists were warned against using it against the evacuating Egyptian forces.

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The Effects of Egyptian Withdrawal

6. The single factor most responsible for recent royalist successes, however, has been the pullout of Egyptian aircraft and troops, who at one time numbered over 60,000. The republican position began to deteriorate as the evacuation, which began in September, proceeded.

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The only significant response to the republican predicament, however, has come from the Soviet Union.

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Soviet Motives

10. Moscow's reasons for becoming involved with the new government in Yemen in the first place do not seem to have been too complex. It was probably eager to demonstrate its support for Arab nationalist forces, perhaps compensating, or overcompensating, for its very cautious behavior during the Arab-Israeli war. Moscow's action also has something of the nature of an attempt to salvage the Egyptian investment in Yemen and to preserve the "progressive" position in South Arabia. Moreover, although the Soviets run some risk of seeing another of their Arab friends suffer a military debacle, they probably perceive in the situation little hazard of great-power confrontation.

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11. There is no evidence to show how the Russians assessed the prospects of the republican government [redacted] nor how they rate its chances of survival now. Nevertheless, the immediate political profits available to the Soviets in the present situation do not appear to be very compelling, and they may begin to liquidate their commitment if things continue to go badly for the republicans.

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Yemen's Relations With South Yemen

12. The struggle in Yemen will inevitably affect the future of the new People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY). Historically PRSY was part of Yemen, and Aden itself has been termed "the eye of Yemen." Under the royalist Imams, Yemen carried on sporadic attacks against the British in attempts to regain parts of Yemen irredenta, and the British, in turn, used Aden as a base of operations against the Imams. After the Egyptian occupation of Yemen in 1962, Yemen once more became the base from which Cairo launched its attack on the British presence.

13. Although the new republic was named so as to emphasize its kinship with its northern neighbor, South Yemeni politicians have stated that any possible merger is far in the distance. Both fledgling states have immense problems. South Yemen is a sprawling, primitive country with only one center of civilization and commerce, Aden. Yemen is a country strongly divided on tribal and sectarian lines. The southern part of Yemen has much in common with the people of PRSY, however, and their merger would be less difficult. Both countries are plagued by militant tribalism, and Yemen in particular may well be the scene of vicious tribal fighting, even if the form of government is settled.

14. Nonetheless, despite all of the factors working against union, both states--regardless of who wins in the north--will be influenced by a common attitude of Arab nationalism. Both will therefore tend to join the dominant Arab bloc even if this is still under Egyptian leadership. The charisma of Nasir is still strong, and the anti-Egyptian government of PRSY and even a future royalist government in Yemen could well follow Cairo's general line while strongly resisting Egyptian penetration in their local affairs.

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16. If the republicans, on the other hand, are able to hold on through foreign assistance or by fragmentation of royalist power, the impetus toward merger with South Yemen would be stronger. The most compelling pressure might well come from economic factors. Aden has long been the favorite place of employment for Yemenis, and it is still the main port for Yemeni imports and exports. South Yemen has already announced that it will not enforce "regulations" on the Yemen border, but it is not clear yet whether this means sweeping abolition of customs imposts and immigration rules or merely dropping visa formalities. At the moment, however, Yemen is neither politically nor economically attractive

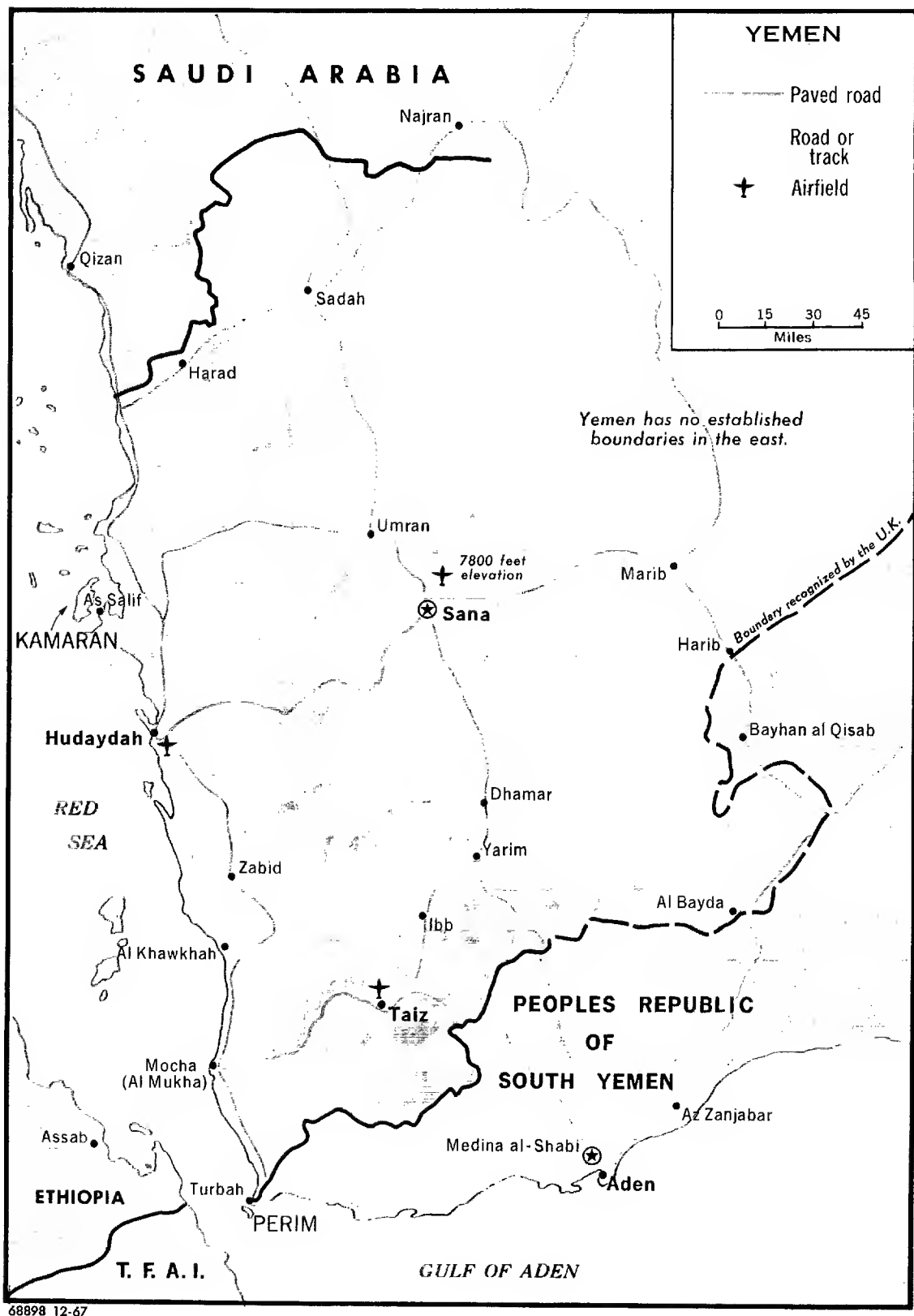
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to PRSY, and offers little except more of the trouble PRSY already has in abundance.

Soviet Attitude Toward South Yemen

17. So far the Soviet Union has not shown the overt political or economic interest in PRSY that it has in Yemen, but this was hardly possible while the British stood in the way. Since the British evacuation on 30 November, there have been no real signs that Soviet assistance is forthcoming. The depressed economic condition of Aden would probably lead PRSY quickly to accept any reasonable offer, if it could do so without endangering potential British assistance. The predominant political party is socialist in orientation and would have no objection to aid. It is too early to tell whether PRSY would engage in other forms of collaboration with the Soviets.

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